BAY AREA CHINA EDUCATION PROJECT

(BAYCEP)

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March 19, 1974

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Irv Drasnin
Producer
CBS News
524 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Drasnin,

Because of your early acquaintance with our project and your attempt at helping us get a print of "Misunderstanding China", I thought you might be interested in the development of the project in the past six months. We did buy a print of "Misunderstanding China" and since September have showed it 43 times: to nearly 200 teachers, to over 4000 students, and to many community groups. We have launched a campaign to have each of the County Media Centers in the San Francisco Bay Area (which supply films to schools) purchase "Misunderstanding China". To date San Francisco bought two prints; Alameda and Contra Costa counties are recommending purchase. In other words, we have found your film an invaluable tool in pre-collegiate education on China.

For your further information I am enclosing a copy of our brochure (which prominently advertises "Misunderstanding China") and a unit on stereotyping that we've developed for use with the film. Just this past weekend we demonstrated the use of the film with this unit for 60 teachers at the California Council for the Social Studies convention in Anaheim.

Finally, provided we can raise the funds from local sources, we are hoping to purchase a second print of the film ourselves. I hope this gives you some idea of what an exceptional film we think "Misunderstanding China" is, and to what service it has been put in public education on China.

Sincerely,

David L. Grossman

David L. Grossman,
Coordinator, BAYCEP

Encl: 2

"MISUNDERSTANDING CHINA" UNIT

PREPARED BY

BAY AREA CHINA EDUCATION PROJECT*
(BAYCEP)

INTRODUCTION

This short unit is designed around the use of the film, "Misunderstanding China," in a study of American stereotypes of China. While the case in point is China, the unit can be used in any context where stereotyping is relevant. For example, discussion can profitably include stereotypes of other racial minorities in the United States besides the Chinese. Still, the film is an excellent introduction to a unit on China.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FILM

> "An excellent historical presentation of how Americans have viewed China, relying upon clips from old films, illustrations from comic books and texts, and other sources that generally presented China to Americans as quaint, ruthless, elegant, impoverished, and of course, inscrutable. The film uses considerable newsreel footage taken during China's war with Japan and builds to a very candid and often harsh description of the weakness and collapse of the Nationalist armies and the success of Mao's revolution. This eclectic documentary was designed specifically to make us reassess our view of China. Intelligently prepared as a network TV special as background for President Nixon's visit to China in February 1972."
>
> Source: China: A Resource and Curriculum Guide edited by Arlene Posner and Arne j. de Keijzer (University of Chicago Press, 1973)

The unit is composed of 3 basic sections which we'll now describe.

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION

(15 to 20 minutes on the day of, or prior to, the showing of the film within a single class.)

1. The teacher (or a student) asks the class to divide a piece of paper into 2 sections. He or she then asks the class to list the first three things which come to mind upon hearing the word "China" in one section of the paper. In the other section the process is repeated with the word "America." The papers are collected, and after the discussion described below, the teacher (or students) should tabulate the results, noting the frequency with which terms or ideas appear in each section. This list will be combined with those of other classes watching the movie "Misunderstanding China" and announced to the students watching the film.

2. After this exercise, the teacher can open the discussion by asking students what images they see of Asians and other minorities in the mass media.

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*A Project of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, Inc.

Examples like Kung Fu, Hawaii 5-0, certain 7-Up commercials, and the Command Hair Spray Ping-Pong commercial may be interesting to cite. The teacher can ask students about other sources of exposure to Asians and Asian life, and how such exposure fits in with images seen or heard through the media. Examples such as Chinatown, a Chinese restaurant, Chinese books, certain greeting cards using Chinese people and language in a "comical" way ("rots of ruv on your birthday") are useful.

3. The class can then shift to a more general discussion of the definition and origins of stereotypes. The teacher might ask whether students think stereotypes are always negative and whether stereotypes are always linked to racism. Finally, the class should try to draw up a preliminary list of the causes of stereotypes to which they can refer after seeing the film.

4. Because of the nature of the film, we feel that this preliminary discussion is very necessary. The film contains excerpts from old movies and comic books which, we have learned through experience, can tend to create stereotypes in students where none existed if the students are not prepared to look at the film's contents in a critical way. Our hope, and the objective of the film, is that students will come away concerned about the effect of a "Fu Manchu" on people's attitudes, not feeling how "neat" "Chinese torture" is.

SHOWING "MISUNDERSTANDING CHINA"

1. The film is 52 minutes in length, one 32-minute reel and one 20-minute reel. The two reels can be shown at one or two sittings depending on time limits.

2. After the film we suggest that a teacher who has computed and combined the results of the stereotype exercises for all the classes announce the results to the students and ask for reactions. The results and comments can serve as a transition to the follow-up discussion during the next class.

3. An effective "launching pad" for discussion based on the film can be found in the very last part of the film itself. As a background to the film credits, the producer has used a scene from "55 Days at Peking" which shows Charleton Heston as an American cavalry officer riding out of Peking with his troops after the Boxer Rebellion. At one point along the road, he spots amidst the onlooking crowd a little Chinese girl whom he had earlier befriended after her parents were killed. The little girl is obviously afraid that her American friend is going to abandon her. But, Heston reins in his horse and stops near where the girl is standing. The camera, after focusing on the look of fear and despair in the child's eyes, swings to Heston, who, in grand, heroic manner, reaches down to the little girl and says, "Here, take my hand...". The final shot shows the child's expression changing to absolute rapture as she is lifted up into the saddle with Heston.

   Try stopping the projector after this scene has been shown once; rewind the reel and run it through again after telling the students to pay close attention to this last part (many may have tuned out after the narration ends and missed this scene altogether). By asking the students what the

producer meant by using that particular sequence as a background for the credits, you can get a good indication as to whether they really understood the message of the film. The Heston scene is a beautiful symbolic statement of the historical American attitude towards China and can be used to begin a class discussion of that topic.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION (WITHIN A SINGLE CLASS)

1. The objective of the follow-up is to fill out and expand the previous discussion on stereotypes with some of the historical material presented in the film. Some possible questions are:

   - What effects do wars have on racial stereotypes? (The accompanying xerox from a 1941 issue of TIME is a very useful aid here, perhaps as the basis of an inquiry discussion.)

   - How did the socio-economic status of the Chinese and the particular stage of U.S. economic development in the mid- and late 19th century affect white American stereotypes of Chinese? What are the common historical factors affecting stereotypes in the Chinese, Black, Native American, and Chicano experiences?

   - What have been the changes in American stereotypes of China over the past 50-100 years?

   - How has President Nixon's trip to China affected American stereotypes of Chinese?

2. The class should finally go back to the earlier composed list of causes of stereotypes and add or change it to see how the movie and discussion affected students' thinking.

NOTE

The above 3-period schedule is flexible with respect to individual class needs. If the movie cannot be shown during one period, it can be divided into two class hours and supplemented with additional material.

OTHER REFERENCES

1. Attached is a xerox copy of a 1941 TIME article purporting to describe Japanese as opposed to Chinese. This has proven extremely valuable in classes in U.S. government and history as well as Asian Studies.

2. Three Generations of Chinese-East and West by Shirley Sun (the Oakland Museum, 1973) is a very helpful text that presents salient aspects of the Chinese experience in America (and especially the Bay Area) in a very readable way. Included in this booklet is a description of the development of what used to be a sizable Chinatown in San Jose, as well as poems written on walls by Chinese detained on Angel Island. The booklet is available through Everybody's Bookstore, 840 Kearny, San Francisco 94108 (781-4989) for $3.50.

3. "That Oriental Feeling" by Irvin Paik in Roots: An Asian American Reader edited by Amy Tachiki, Eddie Wong, and Franklin Odo, (UCLA Asian-American Studies Center, 1971). This is a very interesting and readable article treating films and TV shows in terms of their treatment and stereotyping of Chinese. If possible, the article can be assigned to a class (10th and 12th grade) before the preliminary discussion. Roots can also be obtained at Everybody's Bookstore.

4. Images of Asia: American Views of China and India by Harold R. Isaacs, (Harper Torchbooks, 1972). An in-depth study of American attitudes towards China which is useful as both background reading and source material for projects on the subject. $4.25.

5. Foreign Devils by Pat Barr, (Penguin Books, 1972). An excellent and well-illustrated introduction to Asian Images of the West. $2.95.

RENTAL OF "MISUNDERSTANDING CHINA"

The film may be rented from the following organizations:

1. CBS News Division
   524 West 57th Street
   New York, New York 10019

   (212) 765-4321 Fee: $50.00 plus airmail shipping

2. University of California Extension Media Center
   2232 Shattuck Avenue
   Berkeley, California 94720

   (415) 642-0460 Fee: $33.00

FOR GROUPS IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA ONLY:

3. Asian-American Studies Department
   3407 Dwinelle Hall
   University of California
   Berkeley, California 94720

   (415) 642-6555 Fee: $15.00 plus postage

4. This film is also available from the Bay Area China Education Project (BAYCEP) for showing to large groups of students (more than 100) or to groups of teachers (such as social studies department meetings) in the San Francisco Bay Area only. There is no charge except postage and/or delivery. The film must usually be booked at least one month in advance. For further information Bay Area teachers should contact the BAYCEP office.

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From TIME Magazine December 22,1941

HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE JAPS

Chinese *Japanese*

HOW TO TELL YOUR FRIENDS FROM THE JAPS

Of these four faces of young men (*above*) and middle-aged men (*below*) the two on the left are Chinese, the two on the right Japanese. There is no infallible way of telling them apart, because the same racial strains are mixed in both. Even an anthropologist, with calipers and plenty of time to measure heads, noses, shoulders, hips, is sometimes stumped. A few rules of thumb—not always reliable:

▶ Some Chinese are tall (average: 5 ft. 5 in.). Virtually all Japanese are short (average: 5 ft. 2½ in.).

▶ Japanese are likely to be stockier and broader-hipped than short Chinese.

▶ Japanese—except for wrestlers—are seldom fat; they often dry up and grow lean as they age. The Chinese often put on weight, particularly if they are prosperous (in China, with its frequent famines, being fat is esteemed as a sign of being a solid citizen).

▶ Chinese, not as hairy as Japanese, seldom grow an impressive mustache.

▶ Most Chinese avoid horn-rimmed spectacles.

▶ Although both have the typical epicanthic fold of the upper eyelid (which makes them look almond-eyed), Japanese eyes are usually set closer together.

▶ Those who know them best often rely on facial expression to tell them apart: the Chinese expression is likely to be more placid, kindly, open; the Japanese more positive, dogmatic, arrogant.

In Washington, last week, Correspondent Joseph Chiang made things much easier by pinning on his lapel a large badge reading "Chinese Reporter—NOT *Japanese*—Please."

▶ Some aristocratic Japanese have thin, aquiline noses, narrow faces and, except for their eyes, look like Caucasians.

▶ Japanese are hesitant, nervous in conversation, laugh loudly at the wrong time.

▶ Japanese walk stiffly erect, hard-heeled. Chinese, more relaxed, have an easy gait, sometimes shuffle.

Chinese *Japanese*

Carl Mydans, Black Star